

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5689

INFO AMEMBASSY KIGALI

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0912

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, PFOR, RW, BY, UR

SUBJECT: RWANDAN CONCERN OVER SOVIET ARMS SALES TO BURUNDI

1. DURING COURTESY CALL OCTOBER 21 BY NEW RWANDAN AMBASSADOR TO BURUNDI (SYLVESTRE KAMALI), HE MENTIONED THAT HIS AUTHORITIES WERE BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED BY THE "ARMS RACE" THAT BURUNDI WAS STARTING UP. THE MOST RECENT AND MOST SERIOUS SIGN OF THIS WAS THE JUST CONCLUDED VISIT OF A SOVIET MILITARY DELEGATION TO SURVEY BURUNDI'S ARMS REQUIREMENTS. HE ASCRIBED THAT SOVIET ACTIVITY TO MOSCOW'S INCREASING CONFIDENCE IN ITS AFRICAN POLICY AFTER ANGOLA AND SAID THAT HE SUPPOSED THE FUTURE ARMS SUPPLY WOULD BE A SORT OF PAYOFF TO BURUNDI FOR ITS FULL SUPPORT OF NETO'S MPLA LAST YEAR.

IN ANY CASE, WITH A SOVIET-ARMED AMIN TO RWANDA NORTH AND A SOVIET-ARMED BURUNDI TO ITS SOUTH, RWANDA FELT THREATENED. HE THOUGHT BURUNDI'S ACTION WAS SOMEWHAT UNSEEMLY IN VIEW OF THE RECENT INAUGURATION OF THE ZAIRE-RWANDA-BURUNDI TRIPARTITE "COMMUNITY OF THE GREAT LAKES", BUT HE DID NOT INDICATE THAT RWANDA WAS YET PLANNING TO RAISE THIS ISSUE IN THAT FORUM.

2. I TOLD KAMALI THAT WE TOO WERE WATCHING SOVIET ARMS SALES

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POLICY HERE, BUT OUR TENTATIVE CONCLUSION WAS THAT BURUNDI HAD TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN SEEKING MORE WEAPONS, AND THAT MOSCOW

HAD MERELY ACQUIESCED. WE WERE QUITE SURE THAT IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ANGOLA, SINCE THE USSR HAD NEVER PROSELYTIZED FOR SUPPORT OF THE MPLA. RATHER, THE BURUNDIAN ARMY WAS HYPERSENSITIVE ON INTERNAL SECURITY CAPABILITIES, AND IT ALWAYS WANTED TO ENHANCE ITS STRENGTH. THUS, THE "BUILDUP" WAS NOT DIRECTED AGAINST RWANDA. NONETHELESS, I SUGGESTED THAT THE AMBASSADOR DISCUSS THE PROBLEM DIRECTLY WITH OUR SOVIET COLLEAGUE, AMB POZHIDAEV.

3. ONE OF THE MOST SENIOR CIVILIAN OFFICIALS OF THE BURUNDI REGIME ONLY THIS WEEK MENTIONED PRIVATELY TO AN EMBOFF THAT THE MILITARY'S OBSESSION WITH ACQUIRING NEW WEAPONS TO FORESTALL ANY CONCEIVABLE CHALLENGE TO TUTSI SUPREMACY HAD GOTTEN OUT OF HAND. LARGE SUMS (BY BURUNDI'S IMPOVERISHED STANDARDS) ARE BEING ALLOCATED TO NEW EQUIPMENT, AND THE USSR SEEMS TO BE BECOMING THE PRIMARY (THOUGH NOT EXCLUSIVE) SUPPLIER. INDEED, IN A SPEECH OCTOBER 16 TO THE MILITARY ACADEMY, CHIEF OF STAFF NDABEMEYE BOASTED ABOUT THE GENEROUS FUNDS THAT THE ARMY WAS AND WOULD BE GETTING FOR MODERNIZATION.

4. THE EXISTENCE OF A GENERAL, LONG TERM MILITARY SALES AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE USSR AND BURUNDI WAS REPORTED TO WASHINGTON EARLY IN SEPTEMBER THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS. THIS ACCORD, AS WELL AS THE PRESENCE OF A SOVIET MILITARY TEAM IN BURUNDI FROM ABOUT OCTOBER 7 THROUGH 20, HAS PROVOKED MUCH SPECULATION HERE, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE FRENCH AND BELGIAN EMBASSIES, WHO ALSO TEND TO LINK DEVELOPMENTS TO A POST-ANGOLAN SHIFT IN SOVIET POLICY. AS NOTED IN PARA 2, WE SEE NO SOVIET PUSH IN BURUNDI, BUT ONLY AN

OPPORTUNISTIC READINESS TO INGRATiate THE USSR WITH BURUNDI IN RESPONSE TO BURUNDI'S INITIATIVE (WHICH TOOK THE FORM OF AN EXPLORATORY TRIP TO MOSCOW LAST SPRING BY COLONEL BAGAZA, THE BURUNDI DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF).

5. I HAVE RAISED THIS MATTER DIRECTLY WITH AMB. POZHIDAEV, BY REFERRING TO THE RWANDAN AMBASSADOR'S CONCERNS AND TO THE DESIRABILITY OF AVOIDING ANY ACTION THAT COULD ENDANGER THE MUCH TO BE DESIRED RECONCILIATION BETWEEN RWANDA AND BURUNDI, WHICH HAS BEEN IN PROGRESS SINCE MID-1973. POZHIDAEV TOLD ME
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THAT THE BURUNDIAN MILITARY HAD ASKED FOR SOVIET HELP TO PUT THEIR ARMS SUPPLY ARRANGEMENTS ON A REGULARIZED BASIS. MOSCOW HAD HELPED BURUNDI IN PAST YEARS PRIMARILY WITH SMALL ARMS, SO THAT NO NEW PRECEDENT WAS BEING ESTABLISHED. THE JUST DEPARTED DELEGATION HAD COME TO SURVEY BURUNDI'S LOGISTIC SYSTEM, ITS PRESENT EQUIPMENT, AND ITS LONG-TERM NEEDS. THIS WOULD BE THE BASIS OF FUTURE DELIVERIES, AND SOME NEW EQUIPMENT MIGHT REQUIRE THE PRESENCE OF A FEW SOVIET INSTRUCTORS IN BURUNDI. IN RESPONSE TO MY COMMENT THAT AIR FORCE OFFICERS HAD BEEN SEEN IN THE SOVIET DELEGATION, POZHIDAEV SAID THAT THE TEAM FROM THE ARMS SALES

OFFICE HAD OFFICERS FROM ALL BRANCHES AND SERVICES, BUT THEY DID NOT REPRESENT THOSE BRANCHES. HE STATED THAT THE USSR WOULD NOT SUPPLY AIRCRAFT TO BURUNDI IN THE FUTURE, AND HE CONFIRMED THAT MOSCOW HAD TURNED DOWN A BURUNDI REQUEST FOR JET PLANES IN 1975. HE ALSO IMPLIED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO SOVIET JET PILOT TRAINING FOR BURUNDIANS, ALTHOUGH THERE HAD BEEN SMALL PLANE TRAINING IN SOMALIA. HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT BURUNDI'S PURCHASES HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH RWANDA, AND HE CLAIMED THAT MOSCOW HAD NOT ASKED BURUNDIAN OFFICERS WHAT THEIR MOTIVATIONS AND INTENTIONS WERE, SINCE, AS WE ALL KNEW, BURUNDIANS WERE VERY TIGHT-LIPPED ON SUCH THINGS.

6. I AM INCLINED TO TAKE POZHIDAEV'S STATEMENTS AT FACE VALUE. MOREOVER, THE BURUNDI MILITARY WILL UNDOUBTEDLY KEEP THE SOVIETS AT ARMS LENGTH, AS THEY HAVE DONE IN THE PAST WITH FRENCH, BELGIANS, AND OTHERS. NONETHELESS, THE ARMS SALE PROGRAM CANNOT HELP BUT IMPROVE SOVIET-BURUNDI RELATIONS.
MARK

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